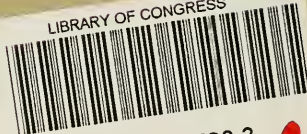


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PRESBYTERIANISM,  
AND  
ITS SERVICES  
IN  
THE REVOLUTION  
OF  
1776.

A DISCOURSE

BY

Rev. W. P. BREED, D. D.,

*Sabbath, February 7th, 1875.*

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# DISCOURSE.

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*Joshua iv, 7.*—"AND THESE STONES SHALL BE A MEMORIAL  
UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FOREVER."

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AMONG the countless events of history there are those which stand as milestones along the highway of human progress. Though, at the period of their occurrence, few discern their significance and none their proper magnitude, yet, as time rolls on, their import emerges to view, and men see that God was in them.

They make or mark a historic epoch: in them the pendulum of time swings through one of its sweeping oscillations; in them the clock of time strikes another hour.

The event may occur in the recesses of a human mind—as when Galileo discovered the principle of the pendulum in the swaying to and fro of the chandelier in the old Cathedral at Pisa: or, as when the apple, falling from the tree in the orchard at Woolsthorpe, set the mind of Newton at work upon the great principle of gravitation: or, as when Morse, applying the principles of electricity, gave to the world the Electric Telegraph.

Or the event may be of more public character—as the crossing of the Rubicon by Julius Cæsar, which turned the whole course of Roman history into another channel: or the battle of Hastings, which gave Britain to the Normans

and stamped an everlasting impress upon the history of the world.

And such an event was that memorable Jordan-passage by the Children of Israel. To unfold all its significance, to recount all its germinal elements would require a volume. Let us hint at some of them :

*First.* Regarded as the last step in the long march from Egypt, that crossing *was the passage of a nation from bondage to freedom.*

Then the backs of millions passed from under the lash of the taskmaster, and the lives of millions from under the rod of the despot. Now, they were free to make their own laws, select their own judges, elect their own kings, and worship their own God without let or hindrance from domineering heathenism.

*Second.* That crossing *was the fulfilment of a long series of inspired prophecies and divine promises, and the realization of century-long, devout and patriotic expectations.*

It was to that Jordan-passage that the finger of God pointed when he said to Abraham in Haran: "Get thee out of this country to a land that I will show thee."—Gen. xii, 1, 2.

And also, when he gave to Jacob the assurance, "The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac to thee will I give it."—Gen. xxxv, 12.

This passage was before Joseph's dying eye when he said to his brethren, "I die, and God will bring you out of this land and unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob."—Gen. l. 24, 25.

*Third.* And in that event were embosomed, as the germ in the seed, *all subsequent Jewish history* down to the time when at, or near this very spot, the Spirit of God descended in bodily form as a dove and abode upon the Divine Son of Abraham. In it were all the Samuels and Davids, Isaiahs and Jeremiahs, the glorious temple and its splendid ritual.

*Fourth.* Embosomed in it was, also, *the germ of an influence that was to reach round the world and on to the end of time.*

For salvation is of the Jews! From the bosom of that nation has come the only religion that man has any right to accept, or that God will acknowledge.

*Fifth.* Nor may we omit the most striking and important feature in that passage, *the great miracle by which it was signalized.* Joshua iii, 14, 17.

In this miracle, the great truth—"God in history,"—finds assertion.

Some read history as if it were the mere hap hazard of human caprice; and some, as the product of a huge mill ground by resistless physical force. But it is neither. It is the result of combined divine and human workings. Nations are armies, each soldier free, but God the commander. All the world's a stage, and all the men and women are merely players, but God wrote the play, and he determines the entrance and exits of the actors, and maintains sovereign control over their actions.

And now, that crossing effected, God commands that the memory of that event, so big with elements and issues of the future, be commemorated by a monument of stone; the stones taken from the bed of the river and piled up on the shore, there to remain a silent, but not speechless witness of the wonders and glories of the hour. Joshua iii, 4, 7.

And there it is to-day! Not indeed in its stony materials on the shore of the Jordan, to be glanced at by the passing tourist, or gazed on by the wandering, marauding Bedouin, but there, in imperishable photograph on the page of inspiration!

Now, in this command of God, have we not a divine warrant for the setting up before the eyes of men of monumental memorials of events that embosom the destinies of a nation, and the weal of mankind?

But those of us who may be spared for another year,

will see tens of thousands of our own beloved nation, and crowds from other nations of every kindred, tribe, and tongue thronging our city, to take part in a succession of exciting services, commemorative of the time when our fathers, under the inspiration of principles derived from this holy word, at the ringing of that bell that proclaimed "liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof," and chanting as they marched, "All men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," crossed the Jordan from colonial bondage to national freedom!

And then, as in a photograph, will be held up to the world's gaze, our own broad land: this Atlantic slope, and that Pacific slope, and that boundless intervening valley, "well watered everywhere like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar," blessed with "the precious things of heaven, the dew and the deep that coucheth beneath, the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and the precious things put forth by the moon, the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and the good will of him that dwelt in the bush;" that imperial platform of commonwealths, dovetailed together into inseparable cohesion, ribanded to one another by those majestic rivers, and pressed down in their places by those everlasting mountains; swarming with forty millions of people; humming with the music of countless industries; adorned with arts that vie with those of the nations across the sea; dotted over with schools, seminaries, colleges and universities where our sons are "as plants growing up in their youth, and our daughters like corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace;" abounding from lake to gulf, and from ocean to ocean, with Sabbath schools, and with church edifices whose spires point to heaven, and glorified with countless hospitals and homes



for the friendless, and other institutions of Christian charity :

“ A glorious land,  
 With broad arms stretched from shore to shore;  
 The proud Pacific chafes her strand,  
 She hears the loud Atlantic roar;  
 And nurtured in her ample breast,  
 How many a goodly prospect lies,  
 In nature's wildest grandeur drest,  
 Enamelled with her loveliest dyes.”

And, now, surveying the teeming affluence of results, the issue of that Jordan passage; results of material prosperity, of civil and religious freedom, happy severance of church and state, of evangelical piety and missionary zeal, who will condemn—who will not commend, if we, as Presbyterians, inquire after and set forth the services rendered in that passage by Presbyterians?

There is no call upon us to disparage any other body of co-workers in the great cause of human emancipation. If our Lutheran brethren remind us that the great leader whose name they bear, was the first in the great reformation to smite and break the chain that held the human mind in bondage, we, with all our hearts, will thank God with them for the services that heroic man was called to render. And our Episcopal brethren may well glory in the fact that the matchless Washington was an Episcopalian; nor will our Baptist brethren forbid our glorying in our cause, for we glory with them in the name of Roger Williams who, far in advance of his times, delivered the golden oracle, “the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control opinion,” and whose biography has been faithfully recorded by a Presbyterian pen. And as to the New England Puritans, their services are too well known and too widely acknowledged to fear assault from any quarter. And if they are to be assailed it must be by some one else than the writer, who derives his descent on either side through an ancestry reaching almost from the deck of the Mayflower.

But with ample and thankful acknowledgment of all that is due to others, it is a privilege that no one will question, of Presbyterians, to remind themselves, their children and the world of the services rendered by Presbyterianism to their country.

First then let us remark that *Presbyterianism is itself a pure form of representative Republican Government.*

That there is a natural and strong affinity between Presbyterian and republican forms of government is a truth that has been fully acknowledged.

“Calvinism,” writes Mr. Baueroft, “is gradual republicanism.”

Of the Scottish preachers, Macaulay writes: “They inherited the *republican* opinions of Knox.”

“The school of Knox,” writes Hallam, “was full of men breathing their Master’s spirit. Their system of local and general assemblies infused, together with the *forms of a republic*, its energy and impatience of external control, combined with the concentration and unity of purpose that belongs to the most vigorous government.”

“Calvin,” writes Prof. Horsley, “was unquestionably, in theory, a republican. So wedded was he to this notion that *he endeavoured to fashion the government of all the Protestant churches upon republican principles.*”

The late able and distinguished Roman Catholic, Bishop Hughes, of New York, wrote: “Though it is my privilege to regard the authority exercised by the General Assembly as usurpation, still I must say, with every man acquainted with the mode in which it is organized, that for the purposes of popular and political government its structure is little inferior to that of Congress itself. It acts on the principle of a radiating centre, and is without an equal or a rival among the other denominations of the country.” Those who are familiar with the forms of the Greek, Roman and French republics, are aware of one marked distinction between them and our own in the matter of *organization*.

The former were exceedingly loose-jointed, while ours is as one body, "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth;" legislative, executive, judiciary, all distinct yet all working together as component parts of well adjusted machinery.

In the commonwealth we find township, county and state government, compacted into a happy system of order, superiority and subordination; in the judiciary, court above court, from lowest to supreme; and above all, the National Congress and Government.

And in our church we have, first, the individual session, composed of men elected by the people—each church a little republic.

Above the session is the Presbytery, supervising all the church sessions, and composed of ministers and a lay representation from the several churches, equal and often superior in number to the ministers—another and larger republic.

Next above is the Synod, which is only a larger Presbytery—another republic.

And above all is the General Assembly, which is the General Presbytery, our ecclesiastical Congress, our whole church in general assembly convened.

The records of every session are annually reviewed and commended, or censured, by the Presbytery to which it belongs. In like manner the records of each Presbytery are reviewed by the Synod, and the records of each Synod by the General Assembly.

A member of any one of our churches, tried and censured by the session, may appeal to the Presbytery, and thence, if he will, to the Synod, and thence to the General Assembly. Thus the youngest and humblest member of the Presbyterian church enjoys the inalienable privilege of having his case finally adjudicated by the *whole church*.

It is obvious, therefore, that our church government is

in singular harmony with the spirit and form of government in both the state and nation.

2. This being so it is not surprising to find that "*Presbytery*" has always been a sad eyesore to tyrants.

"Protestantism," writes Carlyle, "was a revolt against spiritual sovereignties, popes, and much else. *Presbyterians* carried out the revolt *against earthly sovereignties.*"

Queen Elizabeth detested "Presbytery." King James, at Hampton Court, scowling at the Presbyterian ministers around him, exclaimed in his profane way:

"You are aiming at a Scot's Presbytery, which agreeth as well with monarchy as God and the devil. When Jack and Tom, and Will and Dick, shall meet, and at their pleasure censure me and my council, then Will shall stand up and say: It must be thus. Then Dick shall reply and say: Nay, marry, but we will have it thus: and, therefore, I say, the King alone shall decide."

Then turning to the sycophants that fawned on him, he added, "I will make them conform or I will harry them out of the land, or else worse."

Charles I. hated Presbytery—"for" said he, "show me any precedent where presbyterial government and regal were together without perpetual rebellions."

The poet Dryden wrote,

"But as the poisons of the deadliest kind,  
Are to their own unhappy coasts confined,  
So *Presbytery*, in its pestilential zeal,  
*Can flourish only in a commonweal.*"

So difficult was it at the time of our revolution for ardent monarchists to conceive how any one but a Presbyterian could rebel, that *Mr. Galloway*, in Parliament, ascribed the revolt and revolution mainly to the action of Presbyterian clergy and laity.

3. Quite in harmony with the nature of Presbyterianism, and its odiousness to tyrants, is the part it took in our revolutionary struggle.

The *Hon. Gulian C. Verplank*, of New York, in a public address, traced the origin of our Declaration of Independence to the National Covenant of Scotland.

Mr. William B. Reed, of Philadelphia, himself an Episcopalian, wrote, "A Presbyterian royalist was a thing unheard of. The debt of gratitude which independent America owes to the dissenting clergy and laity *never can be paid.*"

The Synod of New York, then the General Assembly, was the very first to declare in favour of the struggle, and this, a full year before the Declaration of Independence, and to encourage and guide their people then in arms. Their zeal during the war exposed them to special cruelties from the British soldiery. In their rage against the Rev. James Caldwell, pastor of the church at Elizabethtown, N. J., who, when the Declaration of Independence was read to the New Jersey Regiment of which he was chaplain, gave the toast, "Harmony, honour and all prosperity to the free and independent United States of America," that they offered large rewards for his capture. Failing in this they shot his wife through the window of her room, surrounded by her nine children, then dragged her corpse into the open street and laid the house in ashes!

Mr. Bancroft writes of the people of North Carolina, "A spirit of independence prevailed in the highlands which hold the head-springs of the Yadkin and Catawba. The region was peopled chiefly by Presbyterians of Scotch-Irish descent who brought to the new world the creed, the spirit of resistance and the courage of the Covenanters."

In 1775, "the people of the county of Mecklenberg, appointed a committee which met in Charlotte, and adopted a scheme which formed in effect a declaration of independence, as well as a compact system of government."

On the election of Washington to the presidency, the General Assembly appointed a committee, consisting of Doctors Witherspoon, Alison and Smith, to prepare an address of congratulation. In this address they say:

“ We adore Almighty God who endowed you with such a rare assemblage of talents as hath rendered you equally necessary to your country in war and in peace. May he prolong your valuable life, an ornament and blessing to your country, and, at last, bestow upon you the glorious reward of a faithful servant.”

To which Washington replied: “ I receive, with great sensibility, the testimony given by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, of the lively pleasure experienced by them on my appointment to the first office in the nation. Accept my acknowledgments for your endeavours to render men sober, honest and good citizens, and for your prayers to God for his blessing on our common country.”

And it is the peculiar, the unique honour of our church to have been represented in the Continental Congress by the only clergyman who sat in that body; and he, a man who, whether we consider his intellectual endowments, his varied attainments, his eloquence, his patriotic ardor, or his numerous and important services, ranked higher than second, even among the Hancocks, Franklins and Jeffersons in that illustrious assemblage, and that man was DR. JOHN WITHERSPOON, President of the College of New Jersey.

A lineal descendant of John Knox, he comes before us in history as a “ many sided ” man. He was a scholar of the largest culture, a profound theologian, a faithful, pious and laborious pastor, an orator of commanding eloquence, a successful teacher, a voluminous and successful author, a skilful financier, a statesman, and a great leader among men. It is difficult to say in which of these characters he shone to most advantage.

“ When the Declaration of Independence was under debate ”—we quote the words of the Rev. Dr. John M. Krebs, of New York—“ doubts and forebodings were whispered through the hall. The House hesitated, wavered, and, for a while, liberty and slavery appeared to hang in

even scale. It was then that an aged patriarch arose—a venerable and stately form, his head white with the frost of years.

“Every eye went to him with the quickness of thought, and remained with the fixedness of the polar star. He cast on the assembly a look of inexpressible interest and unconquerable determination, while, on his visage, the hue of age was lost in the flush of burning patriotism that fired his cheek.

“‘There is,’ said he, ‘a tide in the affairs of men—a nick of time. We perceive it now before us. To hesitate is to consent to our own slavery. That noble instrument upon your table, which insures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. He that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy the name of freeman!’

“‘For my own part, of property I have some, of reputation more. That reputation is staked, that property is pledged on the issue of this contest; and, although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulchre, I would infinitely rather that they descend thither by the hand of the executioner than desert, at this crisis, the sacred cause of my country.’”

This eloquent outburst of patriotic fervor, there is every reason to believe, bore with telling effect upon the fate of the Declaration, which two days after was passed, settling at once the momentous question of a nation’s independence.

Nor were his services confined to words.

The firm and united adherence to Washington and his cause, of the Scotch and Scotch-Irish population, was due in no small degree to their confidence in his piety, ability and wisdom.

He was a member of “The Secret Committee,” and of the “Board of War.” Indeed, there was hardly an important committee appointed by Congress of which he was not a member.

In the superlatively important financial questions that harassed and imperilled the infant republic, the adjustment of which "saved the country and exalted Morris to the rank and grandeur of a Washington," Witherspoon was, more than any other man, the trusted counsellor of the great financier.

And now it is a point that merits special mention, that Presbyterianism is, in its very nature and spirit, *an organizing* force. As naturally as the seed germinates Presbyterianism organizes. It is itself an organism, and shrinks with instinctive and strong repugnance from a state of, or tendency toward disintegration. A half score of Presbyterians in contiguity, whether on our western frontiers, or in the heart of Asia, are sure to organize into a compact body, by the election of a board of Ruling Elders. A half dozen churches, find them where you will, inevitably organize into a Presbytery. Three or four Presbyteries will form a Synod, and the Synods will combine into a General Assembly. The principle of *unity* lives and acts as a vital force in the very bones of Presbyterianism!

Now, as the Revolutionary War drew to a close, the momentous question forced itself upon thinking minds, What next? The colonies entered into the struggle as separate and independent bodies. Shall they, at the close of the war, when victory has crowned their efforts in the field, revert to their former state of isolation?

In a debate upon this subject, the opinion was maintained that a *permanent* union among the colonies was impracticable.

<sup>1</sup> But the organizing spirit of Presbyterianism was too strong in Dr. Witherspoon to allow such an opinion to go unchallenged and unrebuked. With all the force of his genius, and with all the ardor of his eloquence did he combat the fallacy and urge the prompt formation of a compact, confederate union.

"I look upon delay here, as in the case of the repentance





of a sinner, though it adds to the necessity, yet it augments the difficulty."

And he concluded an eloquent appeal for the measure, with these words: "For all these reasons, Sir, I humbly apprehend that *every argument from honour, interest, safety and necessity, conspire in pressing us to a confederacy*, and if it be seriously attempted, I hope by the blessing of God upon our endeavours, it will be happily accomplished."

And as the life of the colonial cause had been at stake in the war, so every element of subsequent national prosperity and safety was involved in the question of national organization. Recalling then the fact that Witherspoon was a Presbyterian, backed by the combined Presbyterianism of the country, and that he threw the whole weight of his and its influence in favor of compacting the several commonwealths into one body, we may form some estimates of the share which Presbyterianism had in constructing and launching the majestic ship that now rides in grace and might over the waves, bearing in its bosom its forty millions of voyagers.

And now, if God bade his Israel to take those stones from the river's bed and build them into a monument of that Jordan passage, will he look with disfavor upon us if we gather some stones from the bed of our national Jordan, and taking some of the brass we dig from our hills, shape it into the form and features of the devout, devoted, patriotic Witherspoon, and, as Christian affection has done for Crammer, Ridley and Latimer, at Oxford, and for Bunyan, at Bedford, and for Knox, at Glasgow, set up that figure upon those stones before the eyes of men, there to stand through coming generations a mute but eloquent witness of what God did, in the days that tried men's souls, for our beloved country, through his agency and that of those he represented.

Such a monument will symbolize,

1. *The inseparable union between Religion and Freedom.*

Witherspoon was at once an ardent Christian and an ardent patriot, and his principles of civil freedom he derived from his religion.

It is as a creature of God, created in the image of God, that man possesses those "inalienable rights." And as the God of the Bible is their only source so the religion of the Bible is their only effective conservator. Banish religion from our nation and you send it straight after France and Spain, to anarchy or to despotism!

Is it unwise, is it not at once a privilege and a duty, in this day when atheism prates of human rights, while it abolishes the God from whom they flow, to embody in bronze and set up before the world's eyes the truth—"Religion and Liberty, two but inseparable?"

2. Then, the success of our revolutionary struggle was due to the favor of God in answer to prayer. Is it not well to set up before men the figure of him who, in addition to his other services, was ever the mover in Congress for the appointment of those respected days of fasting, humiliation and prayer, which wrought so powerfully with the people to blend piety with patriotism, and to hallow all that was dear to love of country with all that was sacred in religion?

3. The time will be when among the green trees of that matchless park marble statues of many secular worthies will gleam in the sunlight and shimmer in the moonlight.

And is religion nothing in this city where every ninth person has a seat at our communion tables, that it should have no representative there to challenge attention to its existence, claims and services?

Worldliness has too large a place in common thought, and even heathenism too large a place in our language. The first day of our week we name after the sun god, and the fourth after the heathen god Woden, and the fifth after Thor, and so with all the rest. And Mercury the god of thieves, and Venus the goddess of licentiousness, and

Church and State, hand and foot, Scotch Presbyterianism saved constitutional liberty from overthrow!

And the erection of this statue in that Park, and its presence there, will give occasion for the setting forth, before countless minds, of these instructive and exhilarating truths.

*Fifth.* And such a monument will be a ceaseless iteration of the fact that, to a very large degree, the seed whose fruit we, as citizens of this Republic, are now harvesting in our principles of civil and religious freedom, in our intelligence and means of culture, and in the nation's marvellous march to greatness, was sown by Presbyterian hands.

Finally the unveiling of this statue, in May, 1876, with prayer and praise and eloquent oration, in the presence of the General Assembly of our church, and, as we hope of the Synod of the United Presbyterian church, and other bodies of Presbyterians, will call the attention of the nation and the world to these facts, reminding them that the Presbyterian church is, in its nature and form, a Representative Republic; and that, ever hated by tyrants, ever a champion of truths that create moral nerve and muscle, and fit men to dare and do and endure, it has deserved and does deserve a deep place in the gratitude, and a high place in the admiration of the nation, for its services in the cause of God and man.

For ourself, we are persuaded that the measure we propose will, in no feeble way, subserve the great cause of our holy religion.

Mars the god of slaughter, shine down upon us in mighty splendor from the bright skies of Jehovah.

The time is nearing when religion will abolish this heathenism, and call the days of the week after the christian graces: love, joy, peace, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; and the sun and planets after the apostles, and the great star systems after the patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs. And, as God is the God of mind and art and civilization, why should we not demand for the forms of his servants a place among the monumental structures that tell of the heroic deeds and days of old?

*Fourth.* Such a monument will challenge the attention of our sons and daughters, to the character and historic glories of our cherished Presbyterian system.

It is, in great measure, through lack of information on these points, that some of them exchange their church for another, as readily as they throw away an old shoe string.

They need to be reminded that so many of the world's heroic ones were Presbyterians! Coligny and his noble army of Huguenots were Presbyterians! William the Silent and his noble army of Netherland warriors were Presbyterians! And what need to speak of Knox, whom Carlyle pronounced "the bravest of all Scotchmen;" whom Froude calls "the representative of all that was best in Scotland," and of whom he adds "no grander figure can be found in the history of the Reformation in this island;" or of the Melvilles and their compeers; or of those brave Covenanters, who spread their Declaration of Independence on the broad tombstones in Grey Friars Church-yard, and signed it, some of them with a pen dipped in their veins opened for the purpose!

Our youth need to be taught, and perchance some of their elders reminded, that more than once, Presbyterian sagacity, piety and heroism, saved the Reformation in England, and that, once at least, when that triumvirate of tyrants, Charles, Wentworth and Laud, had bound England,

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